

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
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CLAIMS

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1. (Currently Amended) A method for providing ~~remote~~ access to a public switched telephone network by offsetting the service cost through charging a set activation fee, comprising:

receiving, at a ~~network element~~, a telephone number and billing information from a set activation fee pay telephone, the set activation fee pay telephone associated with an originating telephone number;

after receiving the telephone number and the billing information, determining whether the billing information is valid;

if the billing information is valid, then placing causing a telephone call to be connected to the telephone number received from the set activation fee pay telephone;

identifying the telephone call as having the originating telephone number associated with the set activation fee telephone; and

based on the identification, charging the set activation fee for the telephone call regardless of the telephone number.

2. (Original) The method of claim 1, further comprising providing a dial tone to the set activation fee telephone from the public switched telephone network if the billing information is valid.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein identifying the telephone call as having the originating telephone number, comprises:

querying a database for the presence of the originating telephone number associated with the set activation fee pay telephone, the database comprising a

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
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plurality of originating telephone numbers associated with a plurality of set activation fee pay telephones; and

if the query is positive, then determining that the telephone call originated from the set activation fee pay telephone.

4. (Original) The method of claim 3 wherein the database is associated with a Service Control Point (SCP).

5. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein determining whether the billing information is valid comprises:

querying a database for the presence of the billing information, the database comprising a plurality of numbers associated with a plurality of entries associated with a plurality of valid billing accounts.

6. (Original) The method of claim 5 wherein the database is associated with a Service Control Point.

7. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein the set activation fee is the same for every telephone call placed from the set activation fee telephone.

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
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Response to Office Action Mailed April 9th, 2003

8. (Currently Amended) In a public switched telephone network, a method for charging a set activation fee to a caller using a pay telephone, comprising:

~~receiving, at a network element, a telephone number corresponding to a called terminating element;~~

~~receiving, at the network element, billing information;~~

~~after receiving the billing information, determining whether the billing information is present within a first database;~~

~~in the event that the billing information is present in the first database, placing the telephone call;~~

~~otherwise, informing the caller that the telephone call may not be placed;~~

~~determining whether the telephone number corresponding to the pay telephone is present in a second database; and~~

~~in the event the telephone number corresponding to the pay telephone is present in the second database, charging a set activation fee to the caller at the termination of the telephone call regardless of the telephone number.~~

9. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the set activation fee is charged by adding a single line item to a bill corresponding to the billing information.

10. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the first database and the second database are the same.

11. (Original) The method of claim 8, wherein the billing information comprises one of the group of a credit card number, a smart card number, a calling card number, or a telephone account number.

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
Filed: December 30, 1999
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12. (Original) A system for charging a set activation fee whenever a caller places a telephone call from a set activation fee pay telephone, comprising:

the set activation fee pay telephone operative to

- internally generate a dial tone for presentation to the caller;
- receive a telephone number and billing information from the caller;
- transmit the billing information to a first network element;
- monitor call parameters; and
- receive a control signal from the first network element;

the first network element operative to

- receive a communication from the telephone that includes the billing information;
- determine that the communication originated from the set activation fee pay telephone; and
- transmit the billing information to a second network element; and

the second network element operative to

- receive the billing information from the first network element;
- access a billing database; and
- determine whether the billing information is present in the billing database;

in the event that the billing information is present in the billing database, cause a first control signal to be transmitted to the set activation fee pay telephone;

otherwise cause a second control signal to be transmitted to the set activation fee pay telephone.

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
Filed: December 30, 1999
Response to Office Action Mailed April 9th, 2003

13. (Original) The system of claim 12, wherein the first control signal comprises an approval signal and the second control signal comprises a denial signal.

14. (Original) The system of claim 13, wherein the billing information is a credit card number, a smart card number, or a calling card number.

15. (Original) The system of claim 12, wherein the set activation fee pay telephone is further operative to terminate the internally generated dial tone upon receipt of the first control signal and place a telephone call to the telephone number across a public switched telephone network.

16. (Original) The system of claim 12, wherein the first network element is a service switching point.

17. (Original) The system of claim 16, wherein the second network element is a billing system.

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
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Response to Office Action Mailed April 9th, 2003

18. (Previously amended) A method for charging a set activation fee for a telephone call directed to a called telephone number, comprising:
generating a false dial tone by a set activation fee telephone;
receiving the called telephone number and billing information at a network element;
maintaining the false dial tone;
determining whether the billing information is valid;
if the billing information is valid, then releasing the false dial tone;
seizing a true dial tone;
placing the telephone call to the called telephone number; and
charging the set activation fee for the telephone call regardless of the called telephone number.

19. (Original) The method of Claim 18, further comprising:
monitoring call parameters for the telephone call; and
using the call parameters and the set activation fee to compute a charge for the telephone call.

20. (Original) The method of Claim 18, wherein charging the set activation fee further comprises:
determining that the called telephone number and the billing information originated from a telephone number having an originating number; and
determining that the originating number is associated with a set activation fee pay telephone.

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
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21. (Original) The method of Claim 20, wherein determining that the originating number is associated with a set activation fee pay telephone comprises:

determining whether the originating number corresponds to an entry in a billing database.

22. (Original) The method of Claim 18, wherein determining whether the billing information is valid comprises:

determining whether the billing information corresponds to an entry in a billing database.

PATENTS
U.S.S.N. 09/475,531
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23. (Previously amended) A method for calculating a charge for a telephone call directed to a called telephone number, comprising:

monitoring a telephone call placed to the called telephone number to determine call parameters for the telephone call;

determining whether the telephone call originated from a telephone having an originating telephone number that corresponds to an entry in a database;

if so, then determining that a set activation fee applies to the telephone call; and

calculating the charge for the telephone call by using the call parameters to calculate a first portion of the charge; and

adding the set activation fee as a second portion of the charge by a network element, so that the set activation fee is independent of the first portion of the charge.

24. (Original) The method of Claim 23, wherein the call parameters include call length, call origination time, and the called telephone number.

25. (Original) The method of Claim 23, further comprising:

prior to placing the telephone call to the called telephone number, determining whether billing information for the telephone call is valid.